



Emperor Xianzong of Ming Dynasty Enjoying the Lantern Festival
Ming dynasty, Chenghua period (1465–1487), unknown painter
National Museum of China

‘ALI AKBAR KHATA’I’S *BOOK OF CHINA*: CHINESE QANUN AS A MODEL OF POLITICAL REFORM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

by Carol Fan

Abstract: This talk takes as its point of departure a new English translation of *Khata’i’s Account of China* (trans., ed. Kaveh Hemmat et al., forthcoming), a text that has long attracted scholarly attention but remains insufficiently understood in terms of its textual history and intellectual context. After briefly introducing the work, its author, and the trajectory of previous research, I interpret the text based on the new translation project, which allows for a more nuanced reading of its content and structure.

It covers the following interpretive issues: 1) the text’s tendency to portray China in highly idealized terms with a striking emphasis on law, order, and governance. These features invite reconsideration of the purposes such a portrayal may have served. 2) evidence to support the author’s intentional idealization of “China’s way” upon establishing that an Ottoman Turkish translation of the text was Khatay’s own and analyzing its content that does not exist in other versions 3) By bringing together textual analysis, translation studies, and institutional and intellectual history, this paper argues for a more integrated approach to the study of Sino-Islamic connections.

Bio: Carol Fan is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institut für Orient- und Asienwissenschaften at the University of Bonn. She holds a BA in Arabic language and literature and an MA in Middle Eastern studies; and earned her doctorate in Islamic history at the University of Chicago in 2021. Her research and teaching focus on the first half of the second millennium, with a trans-regional and trans-political approach that foregrounds the place of the Mongol Empire within the Islamic world and its broader Eurasian context. Her commitment to investigating Eurasian history through such a lens is reflected in her recent articles, “The Timurid Regions and Moghulistan through the Eyes of a Ming Diplomat (1415)” and “Knowledge Transmission through Translation: Vocabulary in Astronomy and Astrology in the Ming-Period Persian-Chinese Glossary.”



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